

Candidate pack for Chief Operating Officer

Arthritis UK

Starfish

Welcome

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in joining us as our next Chief Operating Officer at Arthritis UK.

I'm delighted that you're taking the time to learn more about this opportunity and about our organisation.

Arthritis affects millions of people across the UK. It can impact every aspect of life - mobility, work, relationships, mental wellbeing and independence. Yet arthritis is too often misunderstood, underestimated and overlooked. At Arthritis UK, we exist to change that.

Our vision is a future where everyone with arthritis lives a life without limits. We work towards this by funding world-class research, providing trusted information and support, influencing policy, campaigning for change and working alongside people with lived experience to ensure their voices shape everything we do.

This is an exciting point in our journey. We have a clear strategy, a talented and committed team, and an ambitious vision for the future. We are continuing to strengthen our organisational capability so that we can increase our impact for the millions of people who rely on us.

The Chief Operating Officer will play a pivotal role in helping us achieve that ambition.

As a key member of the Executive Team, you will help shape the future direction of Arthritis UK while ensuring we have the operational excellence, financial resilience and organisational infrastructure needed to deliver our strategy. You will lead critical corporate services, support our people to thrive, champion continuous improvement and ensure we remain a well-governed, inclusive and sustainable organisation.

This is far more than a traditional operational leadership role. We are looking for someone who combines strategic thinking with practical delivery; someone who can inspire confidence, build strong relationships across the organisation and beyond, and lead with empathy, integrity and curiosity. Above all, we are seeking a leader who shares our commitment to improving the lives of people with arthritis.

At Arthritis UK, we believe our people are our greatest strength. We are committed to creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued, respected and able to do their best work. We know that diverse perspectives make us stronger, and we warmly welcome applications from people whose backgrounds and experiences reflect the communities we serve.

If, after reading this pack, you feel excited by the opportunity to help shape the future of Arthritis UK, I very much hope you will decide to apply.

Thank you once again for your interest. I hope you enjoy finding out more about Arthritis UK and this important leadership opportunity, and I look forward to meeting you during the process.

With best wishes,



Deborah Alsina

Deborah Alsina MBE

Chief Executive
Arthritis UK

About us

Today, 20.8 million people in the UK - almost one in three of us - are living with an MSK condition of which over half are due to arthritis. These conditions affect muscles, bones, joints and connective tissues. They can affect anyone, at any age, from children to working-age adults and older people.

Arthritis and other MSK conditions are the most common cause of disability and a leading cause of long-term stiffness, pain and fatigue. Together, these symptoms can affect every aspect of life, from being able to move free from pain and live independently, to caring for a family and the ability to enjoy hobbies and a social life. Too often, they rob people of independence, agency and dignity, and can drive loneliness and isolation.

They are also the second most common reason for sickness absence from work, and their treatment and care cost the NHS billions each year. Improving outcomes for people with MSK conditions would therefore have profound benefits for individuals, society, the NHS and the economy.

The charity was created in 2017, following the merger of Arthritis Research UK and Arthritis Care we became Versus Arthritis and from the beginning, our driving ambition was to better understand arthritis and its consequence so we could deliver the change people with arthritis need to live the lives they choose. We're proud of everything we've achieved so far, but there is so much more to do. In 2025 following extensive research including with people living with arthritis, we took a brave decision to update our name and brand to Arthritis UK to strengthen our presence and clarify our brand. You can watch our brand film here.

Our vision and mission

Our vision and mission remain unchanged.

Our vision is for a future free from arthritis. Our mission is that we won't rest until everyone with arthritis has access to the treatments and support they need to live the life they choose, with real hope of a cure in the future.

To deliver our mission, we invest in world class research, deliver high-quality services and campaign on the issues that matter most to people with arthritis.

Our strategy outlines our three long-term strategic goals which are as follows:

- Arthritis is prevented or diagnosed promptly and effectively.
- Everyone has equitable access to personalised treatment and care and the range of targeted treatments and cures available has expanded.
- People live well with arthritis and there is a strong community of support.

We also have two shorter term organisational goals which are that:

- We will transform awareness of arthritis, build the charity's profile and a strong, active, loyal community of support.
- We will ensure that Arthritis UK is a sustainable, effective and efficient charity and a great place to work and volunteer.

From funding ground-breaking research to challenging and influencing Government to get the big decisions right, to working with people with arthritis and our supporters, we are making real headway, but we still have a long way to go.

The amazing support of our volunteers is central to our work now and in the future and we are grateful for the time and support they give us to deliver more for people with arthritis. Read about Maria's story and see how our volunteers help people with arthritis to live better lives.

We offer a range of services to ensure people with arthritis can access the information and support they need when, where and how they need it. These include:

- Our freephone arthritis helpline.
- A range of information booklets, briefings and online information.
- Our online community where people can find friendly support and advice 24/7.
- Our online information and support sessions
- Our network of community networks around the country led by volunteers.
- Our arthritis virtual assistant who can answer questions at any time of the day.

Creating change

There are too many people with arthritis who are living in pain without access to an effective diagnosis or good enough care or treatment. Our ground-breaking research programme is focused on accelerating the pace and precision of musculoskeletal research.

By that we mean:

- Developing a better understanding of arthritis – its causes and why certain people are more affected.
- More ground-breaking discoveries, breakthroughs in the lab, clinic and community, turning into better treatments and interventions quicker so people feel the benefits in their day-to-day life sooner.
- Ensuring that the experiences of people with arthritis inform research, so it's focused on the areas where it can have the biggest impact.

We produce a range of information and other resources including clinical decision aid tools for healthcare professionals and our clinical training team also deliver training to support them in the delivery of their clinical practice. We want to ensure that wherever people with arthritis live in the UK they are able to access the best treatment and care.

We also have a proactive UK advocacy and health intelligence team working across all four nations and an engaged campaigns network who are working to drive forward positive change in UK healthcare systems so that everyone is able to access the diagnosis, treatment and care they need to live the lives they choose.

Our structure

Arthritis UK is a charitable company and a company limited by guarantee. The governing document of the charity is its Articles of Association. Arthritis UK is governed by a Board of Trustees who, for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, are the directors of the charity.

Arthritis UK has a trading subsidiary, Arthritis UK Trading Ltd. All profits of the subsidiary are donated to Arthritis UK.

Our Board of Trustees is led by Kate Tompkins and more information about our Trustees can be found on our website. The Chair of our Finance Committee is Paul Vandenberghe, and our Treasurer is Graham Colbert. The Board meets four times a year plus an away day and there are currently 6 committees:

Finance, plus an Investment sub-committee: The COO is the SLT lead.

Risk and Audit: The COO is the SLT lead.

Appointments Remuneration and Governance

Charitable Purposes

Marketing and Communications

Our financial position

We are in the final year of a long-term strategic financial plan to bring down our operating deficit to ensure long term sustainability, while utilising our reserves to invest in strategic initiatives to improve processes and the efficiency of the organisation and the lives of people with arthritis. We aim to be in a breakeven position on our core operations for the financial year 2027/28.

Over our history, we have built up significant reserves owing largely to royalties in respect of antitumour necrosis factor (Anti-TNF) treatments developed jointly with The Kennedy Trust for Rheumatology Research. This income has now stopped due to the expiry of the patent, which meant we have needed to carefully bring the charity out of its underlying deficit position over the last few years.We are working hard to increase and diversify our income generation as well as fundamentally rethinking our cost base, so we are less reliant on spending our reserves year on year. We will achieve a breakeven on our core costs in 27/28.

As of 31 March 2026, the Charity held £134m in reserves but this is reducing year on year given our historic deficits. This level of reserves has meant that we have been fortunate to be able to weather uncertainties, deliver upon our substantial research commitments and the return we receive on our investment is an important income stream for us.

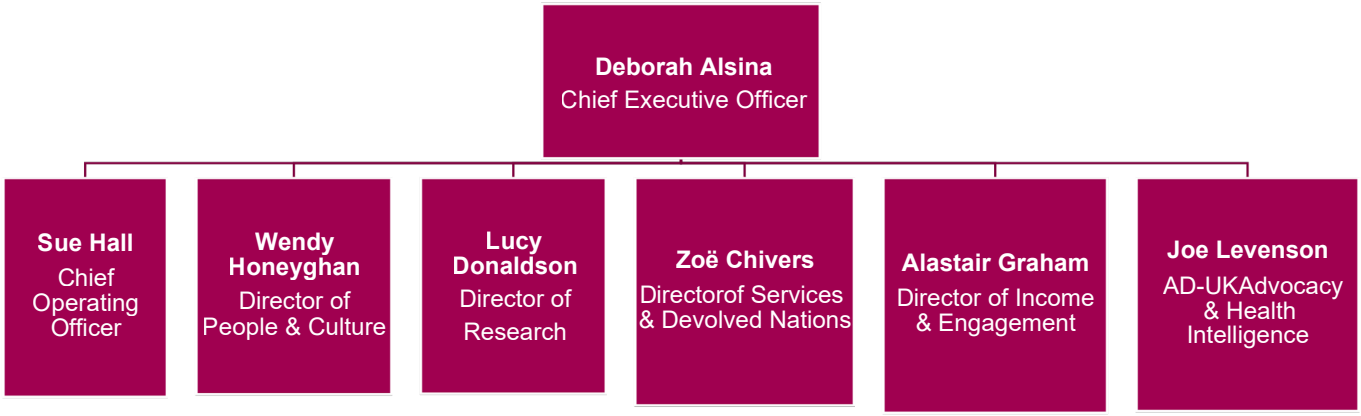
Senior Leadership Team

The Organisation

Since March 2022 our Chief Executive, Deborah Alsina MBE, and our experienced Senior Leadership Team has strategically led the charity through a period of significant transformation and change including the delivery of a digital and data transformation programme and financial sustainability programme which will be completed by April 2027. That means we are now ready to enter an exciting new phase focused upon supercharging our impact and delivery of our mission. We will start the development of our next strategic plan in early 2027 and this will inform our research strategy and directorate 3 year operational plans. Our new COO will be key to the successful delivery of these ambitious new plans.

The charity is structured through five directorates led by a member of the Senior Leadership Team. We have around 310 staff working across the charity with around 60 in the Finance and Corporate Resources directorate.

Senior Leadership Team



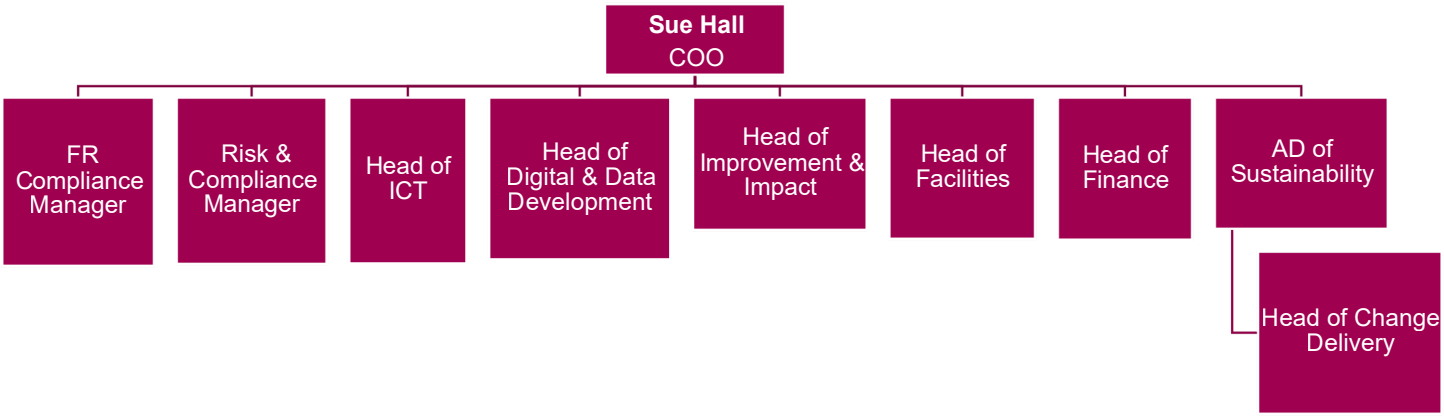


The Finance and Corporate Resources Directorate

The 60+ strong Finance and Corporate Resources directorate is made up of seven teams:

- Finance and Procurement
- ICT
- Facilities
- Sustainability & Change Delivery
- Improvement and Impact
- Digital and Data
- Audit and Compliance

Senior Management Team





Role description

The role reports to the Chief Executive.

Direct reports: AD - Sustainability, Head of Finance; Head of Improvement and Impact; Head of ICT; Head of Digital and Data Development, Head of Facilities, Risk & Compliance Manager, Fundraising Compliance Manager

Key relationships: Chief Executive; Senior Leadership Team (SLT); Trustees; internal and external auditors.

About this role

We have big ambitions and the key to our success will be evolving and delivering our long-term financial and corporate resources plan so that we can increase our impact and reach in the future.

This is a strategically important position within the charity. We are looking for someone with significant experience to provide inspiring leadership to the team and to work very closely in partnership with the CEO to lead on internal delivery, so that the CEO can increasingly be more focused on external representation, partnership building, influencing and fundraising.

As a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), you will also be collectively responsible for inspiring, motivating and leading all our people to deliver our strategic plan. All members of the SLT are expected to:

- Be leaders for Arthritis UK first and their areas of expertise and responsibility second.
- Provide clear, confident articulation of our organisational purpose and direction of travel.
- Role model and actively embed our new values and commitments across all activities.
- Work collectively to consider options, develop solutions and agree actions.
- Actively champion our brand values with energy and dynamism.
- Be visible when and where needed, both internally and externally.
- Inspire, motivate, support, challenge and develop our people.
- Seek out, support and act on the input and recommendations of expert leads.
- Promote employee wellbeing.

Role description

To provide inspirational leadership and strategic direction to all central functions within the charity and for staff across the charity.

You will ensure we have a clear financial strategy that makes the best use of our resources and is sustainable in the long term. You will lead expert teams to deliver excellence in policy, process and systems across all our enabling functions to ensure that we are a well-managed organisation with strong foundations. This includes ensuring our governance is in line with charity commission and other relevant guidance.

Main responsibilities

- Acting as the charity's Chief Financial Officer, supporting the finance team to ensure the charity has sound financial plans, robust controls, a culture of value for money/financial responsibility, and a skilled team who partner with the business
- Acting as the CEO's official deputy - other directors will deputise in their specific areas of responsibility
- Ensuring accurate and insightful impact and performance reporting and building a performance culture across the charity
- Leading our organisational planning process, working closely with the CEO and SLT colleagues
- Providing oversight of financial infrastructure and data, including oversight of budget frameworks
- Ensuring that the charity has a clear understanding of risk and control, including management of internal and external auditing programmes, and exemplary safeguarding practice
- Acting as Company Secretary and registered with Companies House for this purpose
- Managing an efficient corporate governance function working closely with the CEO and Executive Administration team to ensure committee and trustee support and legal advice is timely and effective
- Ensuring full compliance with Charity Commission guidance, legislation and relevant standards for best practice across the scope of the role
- Ensuring a comprehensive assurance framework is in place including ensuring that we have a full suite of relevant up to date best practice policies and procedures
- Providing oversight to the ongoing transformation of our data and digital systems including use of AI, alongside effective delivery of ICT and ensuring our cyber security
- Providing leadership to our facilities and estates team to ensure we make best use of our office resources in our hybrid working environment
- Ensuring we continue to deliver an effective procurement function
- Supporting the Director of Income and Engagement to build and deliver the charity's income generation strategy including supporting the development of new income streams and the cultivation of new potential partners
- Providing expert advice and insight into finance and corporate resources to the CEO, SLT and Board of Trustees
- Representing the charity at external events, meetings and conferences
- Delivering inspirational leadership to the directorate and as a member of SLT across the charity. Ensuring staff are clear about the charity's strategic priorities and directorate plans, have clear objectives and are developed to their full potential

- Developing and managing the directorate's income and expenditure budgets and providing regular and timely updates to the CEO, Trustees, and finance team.
- Building a strong positive values-based culture within the directorate that intentionally ensures psychological safety and a sense of belonging and enables all staff to reach their full potential.

Key objectives – how success will be demonstrated in line with agreed targets:

- Clear financial strategy being actively used to guide organisational development and a management reduction of deficit and return to a balanced budget
- Effective organisational narrative and budget planning delivered
- Positive impact and performance indicators developed across the charity and directorate performance indicators achieved
- Full compliance with Charity Commission guidance, legislation and relevant standards for best practice across scope of the role
- Positive internal and external audit assessments
- Comprehensive assurance framework in place
- Awards and procurement delivered efficiently and effectively
- Transformation of our data and digital systems and best use of our ICT resources achieved



Person specification

As an experienced leader with exceptional interpersonal skills, you will work closely with the Chief Executive, SLT colleagues and Trustees to ensure that the operations of the charity are fully aligned, focused and effective, delivering on time and to budget. You will be highly experienced with expert knowledge of finance and corporate resources.

You will be a consistently good storyteller, providing a clear and compelling strategic narrative so that our people understand and collectively embrace our ambitions, priorities and ways of working.

You will understand what it takes to deliver charitable activities at scale, including via digital technologies, and provide confident leadership to support the organisation as it continues to evolve. You will have commercial acumen ensuring our sustainable future over the long term.

All members of the SLT are expected to keep people with arthritis at the heart of decision making, and to actively role model and champion our values and behaviours and flexible ways of working. You must demonstrate the skills required to effectively lead and manage teams who work flexibly across the organisation.

Below we set out the specific knowledge, experience, skills and abilities needed to be effective in the role.

Essential Knowledge and Experience

- Strategic financial leadership spanning organisational planning, budgeting, risk and reporting
- Excellent knowledge of charity financial management
- Experience of improving policies and processes in comparable organisations
- Experience of running high-quality infrastructure services
- Experience of managing teams through change
- Evidence of acting as client or expert user in the design and delivery of new systems
- Success in delivering increased cost-effectiveness
- Evidence of building impact and performance metrics and delivering tangible improvements in infrastructure services
- Understanding of the requirements of legislation, Charity Commission and professional body guidance on being a well-managed charity
- A good working knowledge of how the different functions in the directorate operate, what their challenges are and how they should be working
- Knowledge of procurement and contract management
- Understanding of risk and safeguarding

Desirable

- Qualified accountant

Skills and abilities

- Ability to work with ambiguity, lead through uncertainty, and generate and support effective networks that are focused on the delivery of our strategic priorities
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills, with a demonstrable ability to take account of and respond to information from a range of sources when developing plans, and to communicate complex concepts and new ideas persuasively to stakeholders at all levels
- Strong organisational development skills, with the ability to identify and act on opportunities to drive performance in business processes and operations

Leadership style and behaviours

- Values driven with a strong commitment to our cause and to championing and embedding equity, diversity and inclusion in all we do.
- Demonstrates strong interpersonal skills, builds trust quickly and works collaboratively with a diverse range of colleagues and stakeholders.
- Able to spot and act on opportunities to innovate and improve the effectiveness and impact of what we do and the way we work, as well as having the ability to work simultaneously on multiple priorities.
- A natural collaborator, able to lead work across the charity and build strategic partnerships of benefit to people with arthritis.



Terms of appointment

At Arthritis UK, we want to be a great employer, focusing on flexibility, inclusion, collaboration and health and wellbeing. We live our values, putting people with arthritis at the heart of what we do. We believe our employment offer is compelling and competitive. It's been developed with our people to reflect what matters most to them, the value that we place on people and our beliefs as a charity.

Salary

The salary for this role is up to £140,000 per annum on a full-time permanent basis.

Location

Office based (London or Sheffield) with a minimum of 40% office attendance. Regular attendance at all of our offices will be required (London, Sheffield, Belfast, Cardiff, Glasgow)

Our working environments and practices encourage and support you to have greater control of where, when and how you work. You will be supported to work flexibly, collaboratively and inclusively to meet your needs and the needs of the organisation. From standing-friendly meetings and smart use of technology to flexible working hours and locations, we want our people to have a healthy work/life balance.

Pension

When you start, you'll have access to free and independent pension advice through Lucas Fettes Financial Planning Ltd. If you qualify, you'll be auto enrolled into our group personal pension plan provided by Royal London. To start, you'll contribute 3% and we'll put in 6%. After your first year if you contribute a minimum of 6%, we will increase our contribution to 10%.

Annual leave

34 days annual leave including public holidays, rising incrementally to 38 days annual leave after four years.

Additional benefits

- Health and wellbeing – we aim to be an exemplar employer for people with arthritis, other musculoskeletal conditions and other disabilities.
- Contribution to cost of eyesight tests and prescription glasses or contact lenses.
- 24/7 access to our employee assistance programme and to health plan where you can claim towards the costs of your everyday health.
- Parenting policies including enhanced maternity, paternity and adoption pay, as well as enhanced paternity leave.

- Learning and development through face-to-face and online learning.
- Life assurance.
- Giving something back through our payroll giving scheme.
- 21 hours of volunteering time paid a year.
- Interest-free season ticket loans and car park season tickets.
- Cycle to work scheme.

Please note through our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, we have made a commitment to increase the diversity of our charity, and we welcome candidates from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. We want our employees, volunteers and trustees to represent the broad diversity of the communities of which we are a part.

Arthritis UK is committed to keeping children, young people and vulnerable adults safe from harm. During the recruitment process Arthritis UK will undertake safer recruitment practices and relevant checks to ensure applicants are suitable to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults.



How to apply

We hope you will consider making an application. To make an application, please click here with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides).
- A supporting statement (no more than two sides) that sets out why you think this role is the right move for you and how you meet the knowledge and experience criteria.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

Closing date: Monday 7th December 2026

